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REPORT OF THE MISSION DISPATCHED BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO INVESTIGATE REPORTS OF THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN AZERBAIJAN

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In a letter dated 1 June 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/24053), it was stated that the armed forces of Armenia had resorted to using chemical weapons. It was reported that the effects of iprit, cyanide and phosgen were detected during blood tests of wounded Azeris in recent events in Nakhichevan.

2. In identical letters dated 11 June 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council (S/24103), the Permanent Representative reported, inter alia, that 36 documents had been given to the United Nations fact-finding mission recently in Azerbaijan. As indicated in the annex to the letters, some of the documents concerned results of the analysis of tests for use of chemical weapons carried out by the Ministry of Health of the Azerbaijani Republic.

3. On 8 June 1992 the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia addressed a letter to the Secretary-General in which he stated that the accusations concerning the use of chemical weapons by Armenia were completely untrue. He requested that a group of competent experts be dispatched to the conflict zones to assess the situation.

4. From the information provided to the Secretary-General, it appeared that the incidents had occurred in April and May. Notwithstanding the time that had passed and the ambiguity of the reports, in view of the gravity associated with the possible use of chemical, bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons, the Secretary-General decided that an investigation was warranted, on the basis of the guidelines and procedures set out in A/44/561 and endorsed by the General Assembly in 1990.

5. For this investigation, the Secretary-General, under his own authority, appointed a mission of three qualified experts assisted by two members of the

Secretariat. The Security Council was informed of the decision to carry out an investigation during informal consultations on 19 June 1992.

6. The experts appointed were:

Dr. Johan Santesson
Research Director
National Defence Research Establishment, NBC
Defence Department
Umea, Sweden

Mr. Heiner Staub
Chemical Engineer
NC-Laboratory Spiez
Defence Technology and Procurement Agency
Switzerland

Dr. Jan Willems, Colonel MC
Commander, Royal School of the Medical Services
of the Belgian Armed Forces
Ghent, Belgium

The work of the mission was led and coordinated by Mr. Derek Boothby, Principal Officer, Office for Disarmament Affairs of the Department of Political Affairs, who facilitated its organization and ensured liaison with the competent authorities. The team was given communications support by Mr. Woodrow Brown, Electronic Services Division, Department of Administration and Management.

7. The mission arrived in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 4 July 1992. In the course of their investigation, the members visited the areas of Fizuly and Kubatli in southern Azerbaijan, interviewed reported casualties in hospitals in Baku and also visited the chemical and radiometric laboratory of the Civil Defence Headquarters in Baku. On 8 July 1992 the mission visited Erevan, Armenia, for brief discussions with the Armenian authorities, before returning later that day to Geneva.

8. The Secretary-General wishes to express his appreciation to the Governments of Belgium, Sweden and Switzerland for making available the services of the experts, and also to the Government of Switzerland for the provision of the aircraft that enabled the mission and its equipment to be transported efficiently to and from the region.

9. In transmitting the report of the qualified experts (see annex) to the Security Council, the Secretary-General notes that the experts have determined that no evidence of use of chemical weapons was presented to the team.

10. The use of chemical weapons would be a reprehensible act rightly deserving the condemnation of the entire international community. The fact that they do not appear to have been used in the ongoing conflict between

Armenia and Azerbaijan is cause for much relief. But the real solution to the dispute will only be found in the first instance by the end of conflict and the re-establishment of sound relations between the States concerned.

Annex

Report of the mission dispatched by the Secretary-General to investigate reports of the use of chemical weapons in Azerbaijan

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

9 July 1992

Sir,

We have the honour to submit herewith our report on the investigation you requested us to undertake concerning the reports of chemical weapon use in Azerbaijan.

After meeting together in Geneva on 3 July 1992, we visited Azerbaijan from 4 to 8 July 1992 for the purposes of the investigation. Although appointed in our individual capacities, we have worked jointly and our conclusions were reached unanimously. Following the investigation, the entire team made a brief visit to Armenia on 8 July en route for Geneva.

In carrying out our task, we received support from many quarters. In particular, we wish to thank the Government of Azerbaijan for the warm welcome extended to us and the cooperation and assistance given to us throughout our stay.

We also wish to express our appreciation for the assistance and support we received from the United Nations Secretariat, particularly from Mr. Derek Boothby and Mr. Woodrow Brown.

We are honoured, Mr. Secretary-General, to have been of service.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Johan Santesson

Mr. Heiner Staub

Dr. Jan Willems

His Excellency Boutros Boutros-Ghali
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York

I. METHODOLOGY

1. In order to carry out our task, we adopted as required the following methodology:

(a) Interviews with government officials in Baku in order to obtain information regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons;

(b) Visits to Fizuly and Kubatli in order to obtain evidence regarding recent alleged attacks in these areas, including, if applicable, sample collection for chemical analysis in specialized laboratories;

(c) Interviews with a number of patients who were allegedly exposed to chemical warfare agents during various events and with physicians who had treated them;

(d) A visit to the laboratory at which samples collected after various alleged attacks with chemical weapons had been subjected to chemical analysis, in order to review the analytical methods;

(e) Assessment of any further needs for sample taking or examination of patients, including the taking of medical samples;

(f) Assessment and evaluation of the information gathered.

2. The team conducted its investigation in Azerbaijan from the evening of 4 until 7 July 1992. It then proceeded via Erevan in Armenia to Geneva to complete the discussion of the evidence obtained and to finalize its report to the Secretary-General.

3. The team wishes to point out that a considerable delay occurred between some of the earliest occasions of alleged use and the investigation. Furthermore, only very limited information on the alleged use was available when the decision to launch an investigation was taken. On arrival in Baku, the team was informed of very recent events of alleged attacks of chemical weapons of the same main type as the earlier attacks.

4. In this respect, the team would like to stress the importance of being provided, before the commencement of an investigation, with information in the format and of the extent outlined in annex I, appendix I, to document A/44/561.

II. TYPES OF EVENTS IN THE ALLEGED USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

5. The team visited the two villages of Fizuly and Kubatli and found both to be in somewhat similar circumstances. Both had been attacked sporadically, one mainly by artillery fire and the other mainly by artillery rockets. One had been almost deserted whereas the other was still inhabited.

6. In Fizuly the team was shown three impact areas. The first produced a hole in a brick wall about half a metre in diameter. There were no casualties and no witnesses but inhabitants in the neighbourhood reported a strange smell to the military brigade headquarters, situated nearby.

7. The second hit a wall in the staircase of the first floor of an official building at about 10 p.m., producing a hole of about 40 cm diameter and partly destroying the door leading from the stairs into a room. Behind the hole on the floor, in addition to the debris of the wall, there were fragments of a shell and more than one hundred nails as used for industrial nailing, 3 cm in length, pointed at one end and with four small wings at the other. Nails were also sticking in the wall about one metre away from the hole and in the doorframe. It was reported that a guard on the stairs at the time of the event was hurt and poisoned. According to the officials present he was evacuated to Baku, but later in Baku was not presented to the team.

8. At the same location a shell was presented which had been found elsewhere in the town. It was the rear part of a 10.5 cm shell, not fragmented, with traces of a greyish powder sticking to the inner surface wall, estimated at less than 10 grammes. It was stated that a person who had handled the shell had developed a rash, but he was not presented.

9. At the third location an explosion had destroyed the upper corner of a small barn, next to an abandoned house. There had been no casualties but a man in the neighbourhood (see appendix II, Medical aspects, case 1) claimed that fruits of the trees in his garden were poisoned. Twice when he had eaten from them, the second time only on the previous day, the fruits had a taste like mustard and after an hour he felt dizzy and had a sore throat, which remained until the time of the interview. Judging that the fruit was quite safe for consumption, examples were eaten by some of the team and the accompanying Azerbaijani personnel. A few minutes later a woman from next door offered the group cherries picked from her garden. There were no ill effects.

10. In Kubatli the team was shown where occasionally artillery attacks with 122-mm artillery rockets (BM-21) had taken place. The team was shown three points of impact. The first rocket had hit a house at about 6.30 p.m. and destroyed part of the upper level. No victims were reported but when the housewife (case 2) who lived in that house tried to pick up some debris of the rocket motor, her hands started to burn. An army major (case 3) examined the debris of the rocket motor the next morning and had developed some hours later a slight rash which made him believe that the rocket contained a poison.

11. The second site visited was an unexploded rocket in the yard of a nearby house. It was not possible to see more than the tail of the rocket motor. No claims were made that the rocket carried a chemical warhead.

12. The third case was a site at which a rocket had exploded in a garden near a rocky road. A woman (case 4) took refuge with her two children under a nearby rock. There were no casualties but signs which the woman had developed made her believe that the rocket had contained a poison.

III. ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY ASPECTS

13. One basis for the allegations of use of chemical weapons was results of chemical analysis of samples taken after attacks. The Civil Defence Laboratory in Baku had analysed several samples of soil, shrapnel, nails, etc., and in many cases obtained a positive result for the presence of cyanide ion. In one case orto-chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile (CS) was identified. No other chemical warfare agents had been detected in samples analysed at the laboratory.

14. The presence of cyanide ion was demonstrated using the cyanogene bromide reaction. To an aqueous extract of the sample was successively added nitric acid, bromine water (to a yellow colour), phenol (to the disappearance of the yellow colour), ammonium nitrate, pyridine and aniline water. A yellow-yellow brown colour was taken to show the presence of cyanide ion. Similarly, CS was detected by the use of a chloramine-based colour reaction.

15. The test for cyanide ion, the Königs reaction, is rather specific since it relies on the unique reaction of CN^+ with pyridine to give glutaconic acid. However, it is not a quantitative analysis but only a qualitative test and traces of cyanide ion can be present in the samples for a variety of reasons not associated with the use of chemical weapons. The specificity of the test CS is not known, but it appears reasonable to assume that many other chemicals might give rise to the same or similar colour reactions. No modern instrumental analytical techniques, such as gas chromatography, mass spectrometry or infrared spectrometry, were available at the laboratory.

16. At the Ministry of Health, the team was offered a number of samples for analysis. Since the samples were said already to have been analysed (and thus to have been extracted) and since the origin of the samples could not be verified independently, the offer was declined.

17. In Fizuly, the team was shown the remnants of a shell containing a greyish residue. It was said that the handling of the shell remnants had caused an unspecified skin rash. A sample of the greyish residue was taken. It appeared to be inorganic in nature, since attempts to ignite it were unsuccessful. In the end, it was decided not to analyse the sample, inter alia since its origin could not be verified independently.

18. Also in Fizuly the team was offered the opportunity to take samples of iron nails which had spread like shrapnel when a projectile exploded in the stairway of a building. A sample was collected but it was subsequently decided not to have the sample analysed since the event involving the nails did not appear to be associated with any convincing signs or symptoms of the use of chemical warfare agents.

IV. DISCUSSION

19. From the first reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons the information was at best ambiguous. The finding of cyanide ion in chemical analyses would only under exceptional circumstances be associated with the use of any of the two chemical warfare agents hydrogen cyanide and cyanogen chloride as both are extremely volatile. Instead, the presence could have a number of natural explanations, including pyrolysis or decomposition of various organic materials.

20. As described to the team in the course of its visits to Fizuly and Kubatli, the events that had taken place were not in any way typical of chemical attacks.

21. The Azerbaijani physicians clearly believed that some casualties of conventional weapon systems were also contaminated by chemical warfare agents. All the cases presented were therefore instances of combined injuries. The number of these cases was small in comparison with the total number of casualties, and they had occurred as single cases randomly dispersed over the zones of conflict.

22. It is unlikely that chemical warfare agents would be used in such a way and that no clusters of contaminated persons, without conventional injury, would have occurred. Furthermore, neither the histories told nor the signs and symptoms observed pointed to any of the recognized chemical warfare agents. However, it should be noted that occasionally individuals may have reacted to chemical substances that are present in conventional weapons.

V. CONCLUSION

23. A number of events were presented to the team as being suggestive of the involvement of use of chemical weapons. However, all these events could also readily be explained by reasons other than chemical weapons; furthermore, none of the events as described to the team agreed with any pattern that would be expected from an attack involving chemical weapons.

24. In sum, no evidence of use of chemical weapons was presented to the team.

Appendix I

Chronology of activities

Friday, 3 July 1992

Team assembled in Geneva

Saturday, 4 July 1992

Travel by air Geneva-Baku

Met by Mr. Albert Salamov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mrs. Zemfira Guseynova, Deputy Minister of Health

Sunday, 5 July 1992

Visits to Fizuly and Kubatli by Mi-24 helicopter

Monday, 6 July 1992

Interviews with patient and medical staff in Military Medical Hospital

Meeting with Mr. Ragim Husseynov, Minister of Health

Visit to the Chemical and Radiometric Laboratory of the Civil Defence Headquarters

Visit to patients and medical staff in the Institute for Clinical and Experimental Surgery

Visit to patient and medical staff in the Emergency Hospital

Tuesday, 7 July 1992

Consideration of the evidence presented

Visit to General Valeq Barshatli, Deputy Minister of Defence

Visit to Mr. Isa Gambarov, Speaker of the Azerbaijan Parliament

Wednesday, 8 July 1992

Travel by air Baku-Erevan

Visit to Mr. Arman Kirakossian, First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Travel by air Erevan-Geneva

Appendix II

Medical aspects

Patients.

Case 1: Male

Place of investigation: Fizuly

Date of investigation: 5 July 1992

History: Fourteen days before, the patient ate a fruit from his garden allegedly exposed to dust coming from an exploding shell that fell about 60 metres away. The taste was strange, not sweet but like mustard, and he felt distress of the digestive tract. Yesterday, he ate another fruit and felt a similar distress.

There are no other people in the surroundings with similar complaints although it was clear that they continued to eat fruits from their garden.

Signs and symptoms:

Nausea, discomfort of the gastro-intestinal tract.

No clinical signs on inspection of mouth and pharynx.

Conclusion: No indication of use of a chemical warfare agent.

Case 2: Female

Place of investigation: Kubatli

Date of investigation: 5 July 1992

History: Female touched the remnants of a shell when cleaning up the debris of the impact. She felt a burning sensation.

No other member of the family presented a similar complaint.

Signs and symptoms:

She complains of a burning sensation in the hands, right shoulder and both legs. There are no clinical signs. At inspection the skin looks intact and not different from other places that did not give this burning sensation.

Conclusion: No indication of use of a chemical warfare agent.

Case 3: Male

Place of investigation: Kubatli

Date of investigation: 5 July 1992

History: Arrived in the village four to five hours after the attack of 2 July (see also case 2). He touched with his hands the remnants of ammunition and developed itching and pain at some spots over the body.

No other people present in that event showed similar complaints.

Signs and symptoms:

Upper edge of the right ear lobe: swelling, induration and desquamation.

Left forearm: area of about 3 cm diameter, pinpoint red papules, itching and pain.

Over both forearms: several pinpoint red papules.

Conclusion: Possibility of contact with an irritating substance. No indication of use of a chemical warfare agent.

Case 4: Female

Place of investigation: Kubatli

Date of investigation: 5 July 1992

History: During the attack (see case 2) she left her home with her two children to hide under a rock. A nearby house was set on fire. After some hours she felt itching and a burning sensation. Her two children did not have any complaints.

Signs and symptoms:

Neck, pars anterior: 3 small lesions, the largest 3 x 1 cm, showing erythema, a few small pustules, desquamation, itching.

Right side of the nose: a small desquamating spot.

Conclusion: Possibility of contact with an irritating substance. No indication of use of a chemical warfare agent.

Case 5: Male

Place of investigation: Baku, Military Medical Hospital

Date of investigation: 6 July 1992

History: 8 May 1992, was hit by a bullet lesioning his left cheek and left upper arm and shoulder, with laceration and necrosis of the upper arm muscles, fracture of the humerus and lesion of the nervus radialis. The patient developed a traumatic shock.

During the surgical intervention, on 9 May 1992, a large bullet was extracted with remnants of a yellow-brown powder. During this extraction the surgeon and the anaesthetist felt tears, spasm of the glottis and coughing. These symptoms disappeared.

Signs and symptoms:

Face: a scar running from the left corner of the mouth over the left cheek.

Left arm: external fixator with plaster reinforcement; closed wound with multiple black spots.

Left hand: oedema, flaccid paralysis, pain by motion.

General condition: seems acceptable.

Conclusion:

Severe lesion produced by a conventional weapon. It seems highly unlikely that a chemical warfare agent has been involved. It is, however, not impossible that the yellow-brown powder present in the bullet contributed to the severity of the lesions of the soft tissues.

Case 6: Male

Place of investigation: Baku, Institute for Clinical and Experimental Surgery

Date of investigation: 6 July 1992

History: The patient had been admitted into the Institute on 2 July, with a bullet in the left regio scapularis and two bullets in the left buttock. The lesions were judged as mild. Nevertheless, the general condition of the patient steadily deteriorated, with fever, tachycardia, purpura and clouding of consciousness. The patient was treated with penicillin.

Toxicological consultant: inadequate expression, rashes, hot skin, hypoxia, superficial breathing, does not eat or speak, decreased cholinesterase activity. Intoxication with a phosphorus-containing substance.

Signs and symptoms:

Very ill man, heart rate 116/min, blood pressure 110/80 mm Hg, temperature 40-41° C, extensive purpura over both legs, upper arm and left shoulder; clouded consciousness, restless.

Under the left shoulder and on the left buttock, one and two holes, respectively, 1 cm diameter, with discoloured edges.

Laboratory results:

Leukocytosis with shifting to the left, with mild thrombocytopenia and increased sedimentation rate.

Conclusion:

Most likely sepsis on the basis of a secondary infection of the shot wounds. No history of signs or symptoms of acute organophosphorus poisoning, the decreased cholinesterase activity probably being related to the bad general condition. No other cases of nerve agent poisoning observed. It seems highly unlikely that a chemical warfare agent has been involved.

The following day, it was mentioned to us that the patient died on 7 July 1992.

Case 7: Male

Place of investigation: Baku, Emergency hospital

Date of investigation: 6 July 1992

History: Patient was wounded on 30 June 1992 with primary closure of skin wounds at the lower left side of the chest and at the left elbow. Upon admission into the hospital, his condition had deteriorated and the chest wound was partially open. During the following days a necrotising wet gangrene developed necessitating excision of the wound edges. Patient receives kanamycin and penicillin.

Signs and symptoms:

Skin defect at the left side of the chest, about the size of the palm of a hand, the underlying ribs and intercostal muscles can be seen. Atonic, pale wound edges, slightly oedematous. Touching the

surrounding of the wound produces pain. Because of the bandages, the wound at the elbow was not inspected.

Conclusion:

Conventional war wound with secondary infection. It seems highly unlikely that a chemical warfare agent has been involved.